

# **BROOK HALL**

## **Bramfield**

**A discussion on the origin and site of the present house.  
Brook Hall Southern Aspect**



**Brook Hall Eastern Aspect**



**By June Brereton Bramfield March 2007**

## Brook Hall, its history.

These are names of people who have either owned or lived at Brook Hall. The early unknown dates come from D.E.Davy's notes

|                 |                         |             |   |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------|---|
| Robert Clarke   | 1584                    | 1720        | Robert Watts                            |
| William Karre   | 1584                    | 1748        | Thomas Watts                            |
| Arthur Coke     | 1620 - 1627             | 1755        | Sarah Watts                             |
| ? Sherman       | dates unknown           | 1773        | Robert Watts                            |
| Ralph Rabett    | paid ship money in 1640 | 1796        | Mary Stray                              |
| William Dunston | dates unknown           | 1800        | Francis Stray                           |
| John Pulham     | dates unknown           | 1801        | Thomas Page                             |
|                 |                         | 1801        | Thomas Page the younger                 |
|                 |                         | 1850        | J.G.Cooper                              |
|                 |                         | 1856        | Mrs E cooper                            |
|                 |                         | 1859        | Trustees of Paul Tatlock                |
|                 |                         | 1885        | Mr James Bezant - farms                 |
|                 |                         | <b>1913</b> | <b><u>Mr James Stagoll Higham *</u></b> |
|                 |                         |             | see doc. No. 73 1913.                   |
|                 |                         |             | Mr Charles Seamans – farms              |
|                 |                         |             | Mr Peacock            dates ?           |
|                 |                         |             | Mrs Wilson            “                 |
|                 |                         |             | Mr Farrar              “                |
|                 |                         |             | Mr Brennock          1947               |
|                 |                         |             | Mr P. Roberts        “                  |
|                 |                         |             | Mr H. Townshend.    “                   |
|                 |                         |             | Mr J Hopkins          2007?             |

**First** it must be mentioned that there was land in the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Walpole abutting the border between Walpole and Bramfield which is called “Brookhall” and also that some lands belonging to the manor of Brookhall alias Stonhams were located in the south of the parish. On the other hand there are many references to Brookhall Way, not far to the east of the present property, in documents of the 16<sup>th</sup> century

For many years there has been a mystery about the exact site and origins of the property known as Brook Hall.

In 1847 The Rev Alfred Suckling writing in <sup>1</sup>1847 gives a long description thus:

“The Manor of Brook Hall in Bramfield is so called from its old manor house built near the banks of a rivulet which, intersecting the village, flows under D’Uffords bridge at Wenhaston, and falls into the Blythe, just above the ruins of Blythborough Priory. The only approach to this mansion, in former days was up the water-course from which it derived its name. This lordship appears to have formed parcel of the possessions of Mettingham College, and was granted on the dissolution to Sir Anthony Denny, and alienated by Henry Denny, Esq., who held it of the Crown, in capite to Nicholas Bacon. Esq., in the fifth of Queen Elizabeth. In 1635, it was the property of Philip Bacon, who held it with the manor of Bramfield. It is now the lordship of the Earl of Stradbroke, and passes with the former, under the title of the manor of Bramfield with Brook Hall, alias Stonham’s. In a register belonging to Mettingham

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<sup>1</sup> Rev Alfred Suckling *The History and Antiquities of The Hundreds of Blything and Part of Lothingland in the County of Suffolk.* 1847

College, and lately in the possession of Peter Le Neve, was “*extenta maner. de Bramfield et Brook Hall, ibidem facta, 18 Edward 4 th.*” The estate formerly attached to the latter manor is now alienated from the lordship. In a map dated 1720 when the domain belonged to Robert Watts, Esq., of Bury, is a drawing of the old hall. It has a community of character with the brick mansions erected in this county during the latter portion of Queen Elizabeth’s reign. Two gables, projecting from the extreme angles of the front, flank a central porch which gave access to the great hall, which was here of ample dimensions and picturesque effect, being forty feet in length by thirty-two in breadth, and rising to the entire height of the mansion. The estate passed from the tenure of Mr Watts to Francis Stray, Esq., of Bury and was purchased in 1801, by Mr. Thomas Page, the father of the present possessor of the same name. The old house was taken down in 1805, when a modern mansion called Brook Hall was erected about a mile northwards of the ancient site. In the old house resided Arthur Coke, third son of Sir Edward Coke, Knt., Lord Chief Justice of England, who lies buried with his wife beneath a sumptuous monument of marble in the chancel of Bramfield church.”

This has always been regarded as the true history of Brook Hall but the existing documents pertaining to the estate seem to bring this into question. Sadly the estate map mentioned is now missing. There are several questions to be answered.

- On John Kirby’s maps of 1736 & 1766, though not precise in positional terms, Mr Roberts Watts who had the estate is marked in more or less in the correct location, though in the index he is put as Walpole. Brook Hall **is** right on the border between Bramfield and Walpole and the estate includes land in the parish of Walpole. Again, there is no allusion to a Brook Hall just the name of the owner.
- **BUT** on Joseph Hodskinson’s map of 1783 Brook Hall is marked in exactly the right position, north of the brook and in correct juxtaposition with Broad Oak Farm, here named as Bramfield Old Hall.
- There was a property (Lenny’s) in 1584 in the vicinity. See doc. 75. 1584<sup>2</sup> thus Elizabethan
- It is certainly approached up a watercourse.
- Where is the site of the original Brook Hall? Some attempts to locate the footings of an Elizabethan brick mansion have been made with no success. No aerial photographic evidence has been found. There is land connected with the manor of Brookhall alias Stonhams in the south of the parish but no physical sign of a decayed mansion.
- The land belonging to the estate in the most recent documents comprises land held by William Karre and Robert Clarke in 1584. William Karre’s messuage is Bramfield Folly, once Page’s Folly, not far from the church and Robert Clarke’s property, Lenney’s is described as a tenement with curtilage and garden. The latter is definitely located in the north-west of the parish and in the text there is a road in a brook to the east. See photocopy of document and compare with the later documents.
- The remark that the estate has been *alienated from the lordship* is puzzling because there are plenty of indications in a manorial document of the 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup> that the lands formerly belonging to Brookhall alias Stonhams manor have been amalgamated with Bramfield manor and that rents are paid to one Lord of the manor.
- I can offer no explanation for the estate map belonging to Robert Watts showing the Elizabethan mansion other than it could be the basis of the present house.
- Although Arthur Coke and his wife are said to have lived at Brook Hall there is actually no mention of the name in the will of Rev Goulde<sup>4</sup> which in 1620 he leaves “

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<sup>2</sup> HD 1433/10

<sup>3</sup> HB 26.371/71 S.R.O.I.

<sup>4</sup> 142 Williams N.R.O.

*all my lands and tenements lying in Bramfield*” to his wife and on her death to Arthur Coke of Thorington. Arthur Coke died in 1629. Arthur Coke lived in it and left a full inventory<sup>5</sup> showing 24 rooms which seem to tally with the description of the mansion on the missing map. An architectural/historical survey would help to clarify this.

- A drawing of the house does exist; it is taken from the family tree of the Higham family. It indicates that Samuel Stagoll Higham junior lived there. The family tree, I am told, was made between 1865 and 1877 so the drawing must portray the house sometime before that date. There are clearly **two gabled wings**.
- A Samuel Stagoll Higham appears to be living there in 1913<sup>6</sup>

It is possible that on buying the property “Lenney’s” in 1801 Thomas Page, who was Suckling’s informant and was through correspondence by others in 1899, known to have been “unreliable”, found what had been a substantial Elizabethan house in a ruinous state referred to locally and on 18<sup>th</sup> century maps as Brook Hall. There may **not** have been an existing ruin a mile to the south.

I cannot find an appropriate site with buildings in 1478/9 in the present location but there is the description of Lenney’s in 1584 as a tenement with curtilage and garden. So a property had been built in that area during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Further to the existence of a property to the south of the parish, a rough transcription shows there is a dwelling and substantial land belonging in 1478/9 to William Reve HB26 371.71 fol. 16v and in 1584 to John Nolloth HD 1433/10 17a. inherited through his wife, widow of a Thomas Reve called Stonhams.

The separate manorial holding belonged to Nichola who inherited ¼ of the manor through her descent from the de Bramfield family, married Roger de Leiston The holding was called *le Brookhalle* in mid 1200’s and came to be called Brookhall alias Stonhams after later tenants called Stanham

So my conclusion is that from the evidence available a property, later called Brook Hall has been on that site from at least 1583 and if not the substantial Elizabethan property referred to in Suckling’s history has been shown to have been a house with two gabled wings.

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<sup>5</sup> Suffolk Archaeological Soc. Vol XXV 1952 p. 264- 287 S.R.O.I.

<sup>6</sup> Doc 73 Abstract of Title for trustees of Paul Tatlock.